**Health officials provide tips to avoid breathing problems as air quality deteriorates**

Salem, OR – Marion County public health officials urge county residents to take precautions as temperatures and air quality reach unhealthy levels. The county offers numerous outdoor recreation options and residents should take heat and air quality into consideration when planning their weekend activities.

Poor air quality from wildfire smoke can lead to stinging eyes and scratchy throat in anyone, and it makes sense for all residents in smoky communities to avoid smoke exposure, where possible. Local smoke levels can rise and fall rapidly depending on weather factors, including wind direction.

"People with chronic lung or heart conditions, the elderly and children have higher risk of health problems from the fine particles in wildfire smoke," said Dr. Richard Leman, Public Health Physician with Oregon Health Authority. "People who suffer from asthma or other respiratory conditions should follow their disease management plans, keep medications on hand, and contact their health care provider if necessary."

Take the following precautions to avoid breathing problems or other symptoms from smoke:

* Be aware of air quality in your area. Visit the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality website for current information: <http://www.deq.state.or.us/aqi/>
* Avoid outdoor exertion during such conditions. Avoid strenuous outdoor activity including sports practice, work and recreation.
* Drink plenty of water – staying hydrated can keep your airways moist which will help reduce symptoms of respiratory irritation such as scratchy throat, running nose and coughing.
* Try to avoid driving in smoky areas. If you do need to drive in these areas, keep your windows rolled up and vents closed. If you need air conditioning, make sure you set your system on “re-circulate” to avoid bringing smoke into your car.
* Avoid smoke by staying indoors, closing all windows and doors and, if possible, use a filter in your heating/cooling system that removes very fine particulate matter.
* People with concerns about health issues, including those suffering from asthma or other respiratory problems, should follow their disease management plans; keep medications on hand, and contact healthcare providers if necessary.

Marion County has also been dealing with several days of extreme heat. Anyone can suffer a heat-related illness. However, some are at higher risk. Those age 65 and older, with chronic health conditions, or who are overweight carry a higher risk, as do athletes and outdoor workers. Those with low incomes may also be at risk for heat-related illness. They may not be able to afford air conditioning for their homes or might live outdoors where they are more

exposed. Pay special attention to these groups to make sure they take steps to prevent heat-related illness. In general, the best way to beat the heat is to drink plenty of fluids, and spend time in cool places. Libraries, grocery stores, and malls are fine.

“High temperatures and poor air quality are a dangerous combination. Be sure to take care of yourself and your family during the next few days,” urges Dr. Leman.

For more information, contact Pam Hutchinson, Marion County Public Health Division Manager, at (503) 588-5357 or email phutchinson@co.marion.or.us.

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